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THE DREAM

By

JOHN MASEFIELD

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JOHN MASEFIELD

Gallipoli
King Cole
Right Royal
The Faithful
Lost Endeavor
Selected Poems
A Mainsail Haul
Captain Margaret
The Daffodil Fields
The Old Front Line
Esther and Berenice
Multitude and Solitude
The War and the Future
Collected Poems and Plays
Enslaved and Other Poems
Salt Water Poems and Ballads
Good Friday and Other Poems
Philip the King and Other Poems
The Tragedy of Pompey the Great
Lollingdon Downs and Other Poems
The Tragedy of Nan and Other Plays
Reynard the Fox, or The Ghost Heath Run
The Story of a Round-House and Other Poems
The Locked Chest; and The Sweeps of Ninety-Eight
The Everlasting Mercy and the Widow in the Bye Street

THE DREAM

BY

JOHN MASEFIELD

ILLUSTRATED BY

JUDITH MASEFIELD

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THE DREAM

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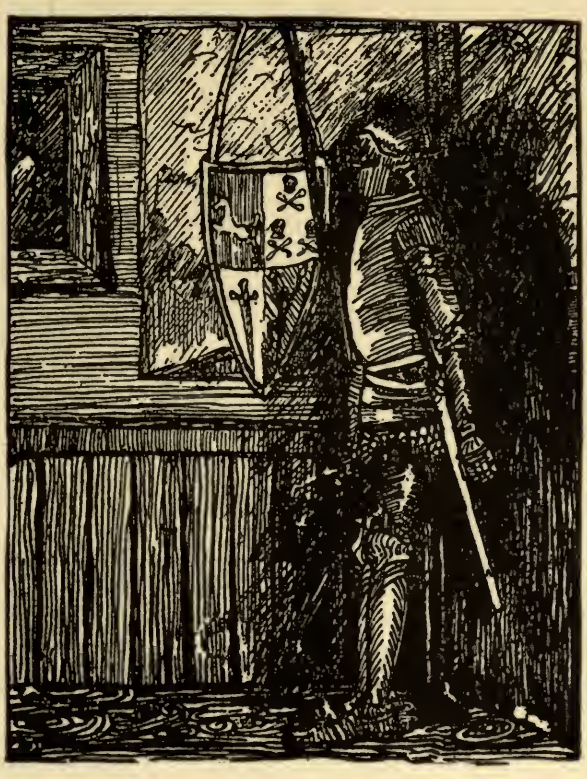
WEARY with many thoughts I went to bed
And lay for hours staring at the night,
Thinking of all the millions of the dead
Who used man's flesh, as I, and loved the light,
Yet died, for all their power and delight,
For all their love, and never came again,
Never, for all our crying, all our pain.

There, through the open windows at my side,
I saw the stars, and all the tossing wood,
And, in the moonlight, mothy owls that cried,
Floating along the covert for their food.
The night was as a spirit that did brood
Upon the dead, those multitudes of death
That had such colour once, and now are breath.



"And all this beauty of the world," I thought,
"This glory given by God, this life that teems,
What can we know of them? for life is nought,
A few short hours of blindness, shot by gleams,
A few short days of mastery of dreams
After long years of effort, then an end,
Then dust on good and bad, on foe and friend."

So, weary with the little time allowed
To use the power that takes so long to learn,
I sorrowed as I lay; now low, now loud
Came music from an hautboy and zithern.
The house was dark, and yet a light did burn
There where they played, and in the wainscotting
The mice that love the dark were junketing.

So, what with sorrow and the noise that seemed
Like voices speaking from the night's dark heart
To tell her secret in a tongue undreamed,
I fell into a dream and walked apart
Into the night (I thought) into the swart,
Thin, lightless air in which the planet rides;
I trod on dark air upward with swift strides.

Though in my dream I gloried as I trod
Because I knew that I was striding there
Far from this trouble to the peace of God
Where all things glow and beauty is made bare.
A dawning seemed beginning everywhere,
And then I came into a grassy place,
Where beauty of bright heart has quiet face.

Lovely it was, and there a castle stood
Mighty and fair, with golden turrets bright,
Crowned with gold vanes that swung at the wind's mood
Full many a hundred feet up in the light.
The walls were all i'-carven with delight
Like stone become alive. I entered in.
Smoke drifted by: I heard a violin.

And as I heard, it seemed, that long before
That music had crept ghostly to my hearing
Even as a ghost along the corridor
Beside dark panelled walls with portraits peering;
It crept into my brain, blessing and spearing
Out of the past, yet all I could recall
Was some dark room with firelight on the wall.

So, entering in, I crossed the mighty hall;
The volleying smoke from firewood blew about.
The wind-gusts stirred the hangings on the wall
So that the woven chivalry stood out
Wave-like and charging, putting all to rout—
The evil things they fought with, men like beasts,
Wolf soldiers, tiger kings, hyena priests.

And, steadfast as though frozen, swords on hips,
Old armour stood at sentry with old spears
Clutched in steel gloves that glittered at the grips,
Yet housed the little mouse with pointed ears:
Old banners drooped above, frayed into tears
With age and moth that fret the soldier's glory.
I saw a swallow in the clerestory.

And always from their frames the eyes looked down
Of most intense souls painted in their joy,
Their great brows jewelled bright as by a crown
Of their own thoughts, that nothing can destroy,
Because pure thought is life without alloy,
Life's very essence from the flesh set free
A wonder and delight eternally.

And climbing up the stairs with arras hung,
I looked upon a court of old stones grey,
Where o'er a globe of gold a galleon swung
Creaking with age and showing the wind's way.
There, flattered to a smile, the barn cat lay
Tasting the sun with purrings drowsily,
Sun-soaked, content, with drowsed green-slitted eye.

I did not know what power led me on
Save the all-living joy of what came next.
Down the dim passage, doors of glory shone,
Old panels glowed with many a carven text,
Old music came in strays, my mind was vext
With many a leaping thought; beyond each door
I thought to meet some friend, dead long before.

So on I went, and by my side, it seemed,
Paced a great bull, kept from me by a brook
Which lipped the grass about it as it streamed
Over the flagroots that the grayling shook;
Red-felled the bull was, and at times he took
Assayment of the red earth with his horn
And wreaked his rage upon the sod uptorn.

Yet when I looked was nothing but the arras
There at my side, with woven knights who glowed
In coloured silks the running stag to harass,
There was no stream, yet in my mind abode
The sense of both beside me as I strode,
And lovely faces leaned, and pictures came
Of water in a great sheet like a flame;

Water in terror like a great snow falling,
Like wool, like smoke, into a vast abysm,
With thunder of gods fighting and death calling
And gleaming sunbeams splitted by the prism
And cliffs that rose and eagles that took chrism
Even in the very seethe, and then a cave
Where at a fire I mocked me at the wave.

Mightily rose the cliffs; and mighty trees
Grew on them; and the caverns, channelled deep,
Cut through them like dark veins; and like the seas,
Roaring, the desperate water took its leap;
Yet dim within the cave, like sound in sleep,
Came the fall's voice; my flitting fire made
More truth to me than all the water said.

Yet when I looked, there was the arras only,
The passage stretching on, the pictured faces,
The violin below complaining lonely,
Creeping with sweetness in the mind's sad places,
And all my mind was trembling with the traces
Of long dead things, of beautiful sweet friends
Long since made one with that which never ends.

And as I went the wall seemed built of flowers,
Long, golden cups of tulips, with firm stems,
Warm-smelling, for the black bees' drunken hours;
Striped roses for princesses' diadems;
And butterflies there were like living gems,
Scarlet and black, blue damaskt, mottled, white,
Colour alive and happy, living light.

Then through a door I passed into a room
Where Daniel stood, as I had seen him erst,
In wisest age, in all its happiest bloom,
Deep in the red and black of books immerst.
I would have spoken to him had I durst,
But might not, I, in that bright chamber strange,
Where, even as I lookt, the walls did change.

For now the walls were as a toppling sea,
Green, with white crest, on which a ship emerging,
Strained, with her topsails whining wrinklingly,
Dark with the glittering sea fires of her surging,
And, now with thundering horses and men urging,
The walls were fields on which men rode in pride,
On horses that tossed firedust in their stride.

And now, the walls were harvest fields whose corn
Trembled beneath the wrinkling wind in waves
All golden ripe and ready to be shorn
By sickling sunburnt reapers singing staves,
And now, the walls were dark with wandering caves
That sometimes glowed with fire and sometimes burned
Where men on anvils fiery secrets learned.

And all these forms of thought, and myriads more,
Passed into books and into Daniel's hand,
So that he smiled at having such great store
All red and black as many as the sand,
Studded with crystals, clasped with many a band
Of hammered steel. I saw him standing there.
After I woke his pleasure filled the air.

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